A Plea for Inclusive Catholicity

I have never met Edward Harding MacBurney. I have corresponded with him to congratulate him on his election and he has received the official seal of the Episcopacy -- a pair of hand-knitted purple bedroom slippers from my mother. I am told and I believe that he has been a faithful and competent priest. The Church that ordained him judged him worthy of ordination. He has done nothing to violate that trust. He has been duly elected bishop by the Diocese of Quincy. The church has moved in many ways since his ordination to the priesthood. Dean MacBurney is a person whose integrity has placed him on the conservative side of some of those changes. But I believe that this church for the sake of its catholicity must not only be welcoming but also be thankful for the witness of its conservative members. My life has certainly been enriched by my friendship and dialogue with Bill Wantland, the Bishop of Eau Claire. I have not changed him nor has he changed me, but we have stretched each other and engaged each other and loved each other. I appeal to the liberal bishops of this House as one whose liberal credentials are well established to encourage your standing committee to approve the election of Dean MacBurney, to welcome him as a brother into our midst, and to be open to his witness as he will be open to yours. In this manner we will help this Church of ours to demonstrate anew that we are an ecclesiastical community that holds its catholicity inside the creative tension of inclusiveness. We will in the long run, I am convinced, be a richer church for it.

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